

Home or away: The great divide

by Michael Washbourne

Remote working appears here to stay, but could the corporate culture of an organisation be at risk if those flexible arrangements cannot be extended to all employees?

It's a question which Gold Industry Group chair Kelly Carter has been asking herself for more than 18 months with the number of people working from home dramatically increasing in the wake of the pandemic – and it proved to be the perfect discussion topic for the not-for-profit association's annual Diversity Debate at The Perth Mint in November.

Speaking to **GMJ** after the debate, Carter said the topic was particularly important for the resources industry given most operational roles require a person to be physically present to complete their work.

"I made the comment in my introductory remarks that working from home is really seen as something that is exclusively about corporate office people and it serves to potentially increase that divide, if you like, between the operational and the corporate office staff," she said.

"Whilst people have been working flexibly for some time, it has probably never happened in the numbers or on the scale that it is now and I think it will be interesting to see in 3-5 years what that does to that sense of corporate culture and belonging to an organisation. Will people still feel that connection to their organisations when they can spend the majority of their time working away from that organisation? I don't think that's something we can answer just yet."

Hosted in conjunction with Women in Mining WA, the 2021 Diversity Debate explored the topic "Working from home: A golden opportunity or a cage with gold bars?".

Bellevue Gold Ltd principal mining engineer Jeff Dang and AngloGold Ashanti Ltd mining systems, standards and technology specialist Holly Keenan represented the former, while Ramelius Resources Ltd manager of human resources, risk and sustainability Lisa Rowden and Evolution Mining Ltd manager of people and culture Cliff McKinley suited up for the latter.

Diversity Debate: Gold Industry Group executive officer Rebecca Johnston (far left) and chair Kelly Carter (far right) with 'cage with gold bars' proponents Lisa Rowden (Ramelius Resources) and Cliff McKinley (Evolution Mining) and 'golden opportunity' advocates Holly Keenan (AngloGold Ashanti) and Jeff Dang (Bellevue Gold)



Prior to the debate, attendees were asked to nominate their opening position with 61% indicating that working from home was a "golden opportunity". However, by the end of the event the vote had swung and 60% now felt working from home was like the proverbial "cage with gold bars".

"I think that was a testament to the speakers and the fact they did a lot more than just scratch the surface," Carter said.

"By actually exploring some of the angles over the course of the debate, people's views were able to be swayed, and certainly there were people at the end who approached me and said, 'you know what, I hadn't actually thought about it from a sort of broader organisational perspective'. There were some really compelling arguments put forward."

Since the inaugural event in 2016, the Diversity Debate has become nationally recognised for its role in breaking down barriers and further critical discussions in the gold sector.

Carter, who hopes to return the debate format to the east coast in 2022 after a two-year hiatus, is delighted with how the event has evolved into more than a basic extension of what people are already talking about.

"In any given year, it's either looking for what is something that people aren't talking about, or what are the things that people are talking about where we feel that we can add to the discussion," she said.

"We've never sought to just pile in on something that is being talked about a lot already. It's always about what can we do with this topic, how do we create insight and further the thinking on an issue.

"There is always going to be a lot that arises from questions of diversity and inclusion and so I can see there'll be plenty of material for events to come in the future."